

Okbichaloni (things aren't always what they seem to be. Know that for sure): hustling, HIV, and hope in Luoland, Western Kenya

Article (Published Version)

Aellah, Gemma (2019) Okbichaloni (things aren't always what they seem to be. Know that for sure): hustling, HIV, and hope in Luoland, Western Kenya. *Irish Journal of Anthropology*, 22 (1). pp. 12-27. ISSN 1393-8592

This version is available from Sussex Research Online: <http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/102292/>

This document is made available in accordance with publisher policies and may differ from the published version or from the version of record. If you wish to cite this item you are advised to consult the publisher's version. Please see the URL above for details on accessing the published version.

Copyright and reuse:

Sussex Research Online is a digital repository of the research output of the University.

Copyright and all moral rights to the version of the paper presented here belong to the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. To the extent reasonable and practicable, the material made available in SRO has been checked for eligibility before being made available.

Copies of full text items generally can be reproduced, displayed or performed and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

OKBICHALONI

(THINGS AREN'T ALWAYS WHAT THEY SEEM TO BE. KNOW THAT FOR SURE): HUSTLING, HIV, AND HOPE IN LUOLAND, WESTERN KENYA

GEMMA AELLAH

LONDON SCHOOL OF HYGIENE AND TROPICAL MEDICINE

You can't *bwuogo* (shake) us
We are hustlers in a rush
Not a ninja
We don't wash-wash.

Life is sweet
We are Digital
Old Boys are Analogue
Migration is over
The signal is off.

Dar *mpaka* Moro
We will ride Boda, ride Boda Boda
Mikono Juu (Throw your hands in the air).

Sweet life.
Kazi va Vijana!
(Work for Youth!)
Or is it:
Pesa Kwa Wazee?
(Money for Elders?)
Where's my jet?

Ling. Okbichaloni
(Hush. Things aren't what they seem to be)

Pressure

Niki hustle juu chini ili nuvke border,
Wanaigeukia
(While I hustle up and down to cross the border
they turn against me).

M-Pigs, MPesa
Priests
Pressure

Ocampo
Only the Bachelor Can.

Not again. We are tired.
 How long, *JoDalawa* (people of our home), since we last buried?
 The earth does not get full
 Death never tires or takes a break
 Are we, the youth, never to achieve anything in life?

We hear you Bro. But:

Ling. Okbichaloni
(Hush, Things aren't what they seem to be)

Take heart, God is in control.

Hey Bush.
 We're so happy you're growing up strong.
 Your parents repented, left the way
 Yet you swallow your *andila* (maize/HIV medication), every day.
 Thank you, Mr President
 Though Obama *Wuod* (son of) Alego is Our Son.

It's *Otonglo* (Money) Time!
 Presha

I do not like to brag:
 In Nairobi I had three jobs
 I was the Human Resource Manager in Accountability in External and Internal affairs – a
 sweeper
 I was the Official In-Charge of Mobility Implementation – a wheelbarrow servicer
 I was the Chief Inspector and Attorney General of Light Arms and Light Weapons – a watch
 man.
 But do I say?

Hey, Mr President – tweet me, *yawa!* (surely!)
 Thank you, Our Father
 I appreciate.

Ling. Okbichaloni
(Hush. Things aren't what they seem to be)

Presha.

But this is a big joke
 Look at this house!
 Cracks and semi-permanent,
 Why is that officer at State House playing tricks?

Happiness of a father
 Is no longer
Mor Dhiang (Happiness of a cow).
Ling. Okbichaloni
(Hush. Things aren't what they seem to be)

Repent and prepare the way
 Sweep the streets with green leaves
 I've rented the penthouse
 HIV/AIDS Healed!

Or, if you prefer:

Give and it will be given to you
 A good measure, pressed down, shaken together
 Running over,
 Poured into your lap.

You're a Winner!
 The Chapel is a Citadel.

Ling. Okbichaloni
(Hush. Things aren't what they seem to be)

We are just trying.
 Know that for sure.

Things Aren't What They Seem to Be. Know That for Sure.



Figure 1: Football and happiness of the cow. Playing football with friends from the city after a rural funeral, amid a grazing herd.
 ©GAellah 2009.

In 2013 Kenyans were on the verge of electing a new President, Uhuru Kenyatta, who was simultaneously facing charges at the International Criminal Court for suspected involvement in the 2008 post-election violence that had thrown the once stable country into turmoil. A new Dholuo saying was coined in 'Luoland', in Nyanza, Western Kenya, the home and heart-land of political opposition leader and Luo figurehead Raila Odinga: 'okbichaloni'. Meaning 'you won't believe', it captured,

broadly, the wry experience of being thoroughly convinced your understanding of a situation is clear yet finding in the final reckoning that the tables have turned. It referred to the certainty of knowing that you would always be surprised. Originating among Nairobi fans of Luo football team, Gor Mahia, as a way of chatting about their team's changeable fortunes, its' use quickly extended into domains of political talk (Jones and Omondi 2013) and beyond, becoming a more general commentary on the nature of life at this historical juncture.

Post-millennium, anthropological work on African youth as a social and historical category hastened to focus on uncertain lives and risky futures in contexts characterised by rapid urbanization, absence of functioning national welfare states, increasing juxtapositions of massive wealth and abject poverty and, in some cases, extreme security crises and conflicts (e.g Archambault 2013; Di Nunzio 2012; Cooper and Pratten 2015; Mains 2013). Youth are portrayed as surviving, gambling, hustling, chancing and constantly balancing on the edge of an abyss. But the Dholuo saying *okbichalani*, touches on something other accounts of uncertain lives do not: that at least in Western Kenya over the last ten years, the felt-experience of such a state-of-being in the world can be one of predictability. Uncertainty does not have to mean situations are opaque or unreadable. And, moreover, the certainty of knowing you will always be surprised or let down in the end does not prevent people from feeling hopeful and energized in the moment.

Ethnography in an In-between and After World

In 2008 I moved to Nyanza, Western Kenya, to work on a study of the everyday practices and experiences of the HIV science and intervention workers, medical research participants, receivers of intervention and their wider networks that characterize the current economic mainstay of this region. It has one of the highest HIV prevalences in Africa and its regional capital, Kisumu City, has been termed an 'HIV city' (Prince 2013). When I arrived in March 2008, the



Figure 2: A home fit for a president. GAellah as seen by Bush helping construct Bush's grandmother's home in Akinda ©Bush, age 7, 2011.

region was struggling to get under control both its HIV epidemic and the excesses of destruction, insecurity and inflation that accompanied post-election violence on an unprecedented scale following a contested general election in December 2007. In 2010 I moved out of the city to a rural area 'Akinda,' about an hour away, living with a widow in her sixties as an honorary unmarried daughter in a rural home.



Figure 3: Digital Life: Slogan of pay-tv company StarTimes, Kisumu City ©GAellah, 2014.

During my most intensive period of rural fieldwork (2010 – 2011, with return visits over the next few years), inflation reached a new peak, evidenced by the doubling price of sugar. A perceived famine in 2010 was nicknamed *Misumba Nyale*, meaning ‘The Bachelor Can’, as in, only a bachelor could manage to live in town where, according to Akinda youth, ‘life is all money.’ My fieldwork was demarcated by elections. It occurred during the time immediately after the post-election violence of 2008. It included the promulgation of Kenya’s new constitution in 2010 leading to the beginning of national devolution, as well as campaigns for the 2013 election of a ‘Digital Boys’ President, then under indictment at the International Criminal Court, who promised to replace the ‘Analogue Vanguard’ (despite his being the son of Kenya’s first President). It was also punctuated by the two landmark campaigns and elections of United States President Obama in 2008 and 2012, claimed as ‘Our Son’ in Luoland (Madiaga et al. 2008).

Through positioning first in the city then in the rural area, I was able to step, albeit very partially, into the practices and spaces of a distinctive Luo component of the so-called ‘digital’ generation of Kenyan ‘youth’. These 18-35 year olds were busily engaged in trying to cross the border between abject poverty and economic stability by entrepreneurial means, here glossed as the Kenyan-English word ‘hustling’. They were thinking of a bright future, without being able to quite shake the feeling they would not live to see past 40 (in this cultural context age 40 is generally seen as the cut off for being classified as ‘youth’). Such youth have become, since the rapid scaling up of free anti-retroviral treatment in this region between 2008 and 2013, Kenya’s first post-AIDS generation. They lost parents, grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles and friends to AIDS but are now able to refer to taking HIV medication as something as ordinary and easy as swallowing *andila* (maize kernels). Though this idiom also has a double edge. Maize is the staple food and subsistence crop. It is also famine relief food, with associated fears of corruption scandals and worrying dependency on donors (Ochieng 2016).



Figure 4: Looking for hope. Shopping mall noticeboard, advertising HIV 'wonder drugs' in Kisumu City ©GAellah 2013.



Figure 5: HIV medication – as easily as swallowing pieces of maize? Sorting andila (maize) in Akinda © GAellah 2010.

I became interested in finding ways to describe the everyday experiences, fortunes, struggles and dreams of this generation who transitioned into adulthood during a devastating HIV epidemic at the turn of the millennium and who experienced the greatest rapid dip and then recovery in life expectancies in their country's history.

These youth often took inspiration from the iconic political and social figures of serious or successful hustlers that dominated Kenya's media; musicians like Jaguar who sung in 2011 about hustling to cross the border from poverty to riches and later became an MP in 2017, or flamboyant politicians like the first Nairobi city governor 'Sonko' (*sheng* for boss), or Vice-President Ruto, a former rural youth who hustled his way up to owning his self-named 'Hustler Jet.' Although, of course, explicit identification with these famous members of the 'Hustler Nation' was something close to an abomination, given they were fierce political rivals of politician Raila Odinga, 'Baba' (father) of the Luo Nation. And as proudly Luo youth they also continued to feel strong connections to their Luo ancestors, even if they could no longer trace all of them; their ancestral land (*dala*) even if they could no longer live off it sustainably; and to their traditions, even as they broke them. Their spirits were alternatively crushed by political events in Kenya and raised by the election of a 'relative', Obama, to the US statehouse.

My piece of writing above is a song; an ode to a particular Luo generational group, caught between being 'analogue' and being 'digital', who were/are trying to make a living and a good life in difficult times. They live in a time of *okbichaloni* where they have the potential to get lost in the cities and turn into 'ninjas' (city street boys), or they could be political revolutionaries. They could end up in 'wash-wash' (fake money), set up a Tech Hub, hack a



Figure 6: You can't bwogo us. Teenage dreamers in 2001 post-election celebrations in the rural by the lake ©Star-kuzz.

bank's ATM, or dominate the Forbes list of most promising young entrepreneurs in Africa. They are football hooligans and vigilantes, and they are anti-corruption and community policing. They could be lynched, or accidentally shot by police. But they could equally take local government to court for misuse of powers. Such youngish people might still anticipate dying at 40 but they are carefully planning for the future of their children's children. They embrace male circumcision as a HIV prevention tool, even though it is explicitly not part of their cultural tradition. But they do not always take their medication. They are serious and determined. And they are jokers. Economic hustlers trying to make a living in

difficult circumstances and social tricksters who use endlessly inventive wordplay as a form of social and political commentary.



Figure 7: The earth does not get full. Mourning a life cut short, concrete grave of a father and the fresh grave of his 30-year-old son in Akinda ©GAellah 2011.

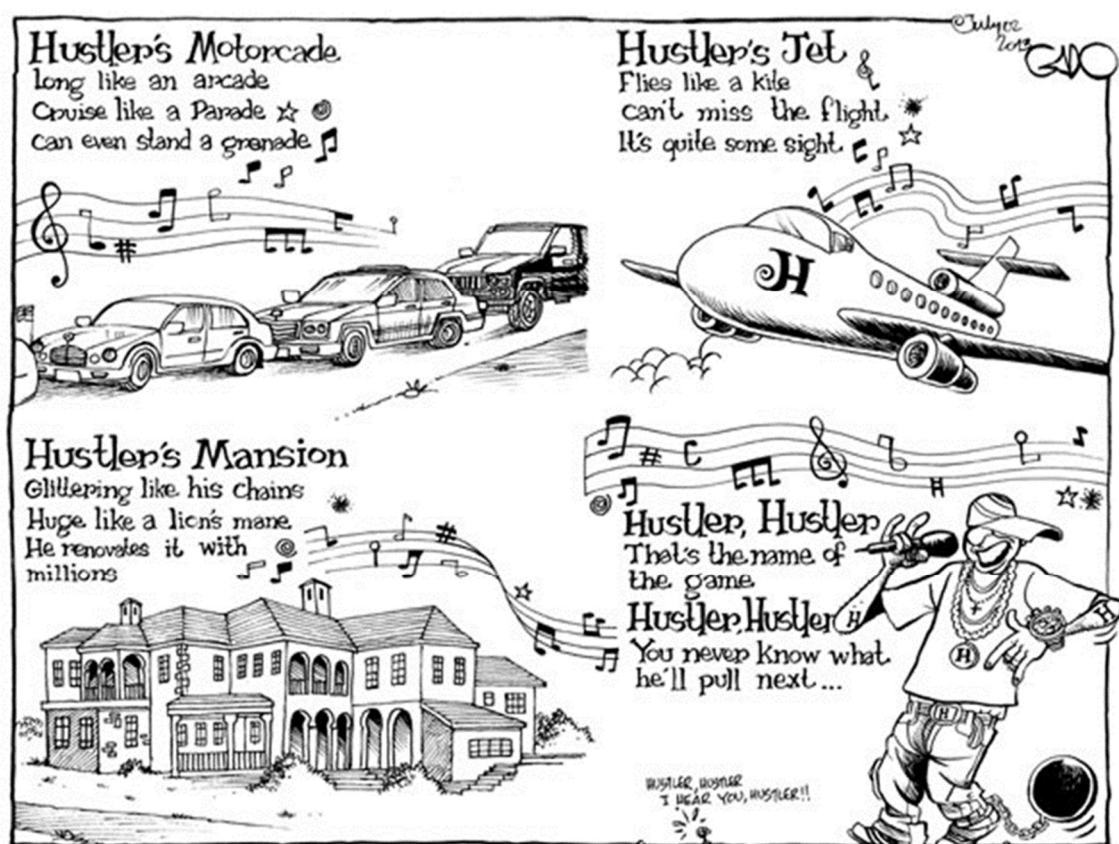


Figure 8: Where's my Jet? 'Hustler, Hustler you'll never know what he'll pull next'. Political Cartoon in the Kenyan Daily Nation newspaper © Gado 2nd July 2013.

Writing in Rhythm

In my more traditional academic writing about my research (Aellah and Geissler 2016; Aellah and Okoth 2019; Aellah 2020), I've found it difficult to convey the *okbichaloni* nature of day-to-day life convincingly. How to convey the co-existence of joy, vitality and optimism with despair, apathy and pessimism? Especially as these aspects don't seem to be experienced alternatively, but rather altogether as the general flow of life. The piece of writing presented above is one attempt to do this. It is an act of bricolage, constructed by bringing together direct quotes from my fieldwork interviews or jotted in my fieldwork diary, together with fragments of popular Kenyan phrases, song lyrics, Dholuo puns, newspaper quotes, and even a Biblical verse. I wrote this piece in frustration after trying – and failing – to find the 'right' way to write for a public health audience about the mood of the 'analogue to digital' generation described above, particularly men living with HIV in their thirties who were struggling to adhere to their life-saving medication and sometimes acting in ways dangerous to those around them. I wanted to explore the more 'measurable' or actionable aspects of mood, and, also, convey the urgency of taking mood seriously in HIV policy decision making. In the process, the mood itself slipped away.

I have constructed this piece of writing to read like lyrics to a song, each stanza representing a different story from my fieldwork, alternating optimism and pessimism, but held together with the common refrain of *okbichaloni*. I'm trying to portray the rhythm of life during this specific time period in Luoland: life in an in-between and after world. Song lyrics felt an apt choice because both music and dance are central to the fabric of day-to-day life in Luoland, and are a popular form of social critique (Njogu and Maupeu 2007; Prince 2006). They were also very much part of my experience of ethnographic research. Popular music blared on the radios of the buses I took between the city and the rural, and on the sound systems in the night clubs I visited with friends I made. Phrases from popular songs quickly entered general discourse. My song shares familiar patterning and rhythms with music popular in Luoland at that time, and appropriates echoes of *ndombolo* (Congolesse) *ohangala* (Luo), *Bongo Flava* (East African hip hop) and, towards the finish, a little of the aggression of Afro-trap, which was starting to take hold at the tail end of my fieldwork. But it needs remembering, of course, that this is the song of the city and village as heard through my particular ears. In the words of one member of this generation on reviewing the piece for me: 'Flows like

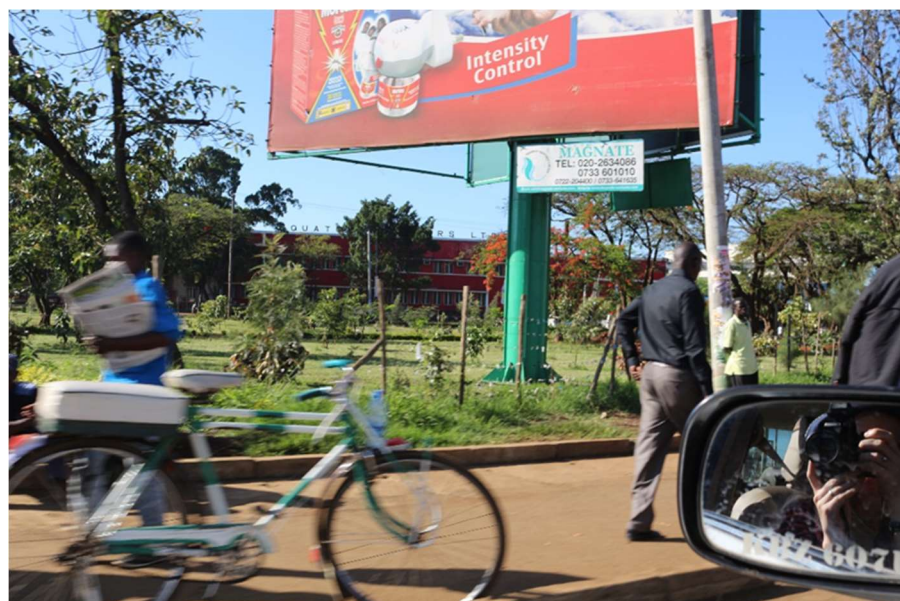


Figure 2: We will ride Boda Boda. Boda boda Daily Nation newspaper seller in Kisumu City captured while driving through ©GAellah 2011.

river Nile. I just wonder if they will understand the flow because these are pieces of your experience’.

Here, I am also trying to capture something of what Kenyan scholars Nyairo and Ogude have called ‘the elasticity of the idiom’ as used by Kenyans in this setting, something which I found so compelling, skilful and joyful when encountered in conversations during my ethnographic fieldwork (2005, p. 225). The accompanying glossary (below) can be consulted to reveal some of the double-meanings and deeper contexts in the phrases used. But, equally, I want the reader to be able to first read the lyrics without it, in the way you might listen to a song, picking up on the feeling, and then only later getting the layered meanings.

With this song, I’m following a creative line I started developing with fellow-anthropologists with the publication of a book of ethics case studies for Global Health researchers (Aellah, Chantler, and Geissler 2016). This was a book created for those working on the front-line of transnational medical research in a part of the world where the effects of global health and economic inequality are most evident. The book is a collection of fictive stories of ethical dilemmas, informed by our own ethnographic fieldwork in various countries but reshaped and transposed into anonymity. The stories are accompanied with facilitator’s guides and questions for discussion, and with captioned drawings by an African medical researcher/artist. Piloting this workbook with colleagues in Kenya, I found that using multiple alternative ways of portraying the essence of a situation enabled us to provoke much more discussion and consideration of the ethical themes we wanted raised than our more conventional academic presentations of findings had allowed. We could convey the ‘mood’ through the stories and drawings and this, in this context, was what was needed to create space for open discussion with transnational medical researchers. I think, perhaps, in other contexts a song could do this too.



Figure 10: We are just trying. Know that for sure. JoNam (people of the lake) catching dreams. Kisumu City Homes Expo poster ©JOmondi 2010.

Okbichaloni Glossary

Andila (Dholuo) – Pieces of corn. Slang for anti-retroviral drugs used to manage HIV. There are several readings of the idiom. Firstly, nowadays, that taking these drugs is something as ordinary and easy as swallowing pieces of corn – which has special emphasis in rural Western Kenya where maize is the staple food. A less optimistic reading is that HIV prevalence is so high as to be normal, or that the free HIV drugs are like famine relief food, creating dangerously dependent relationships with outside donors and a susceptibility to corruption (See also Ochieng 2016).

Analogue – see **migration**

Boda Boda (Swahili) – Heavy imported bicycles often used to provide taxi services, especially by young men. ‘Ride Boda Boda’ refers to a song lyric from a popular song ‘Boda Boda’ by Kenyan musicians Madtraxx (2008). The music video featured bicycles, considered lower class, interspersed with scenes of men wearing sunglasses at night, expensive cars, night clubs and cash.

Bwogo (Eng-Luo) – To frighten/shake. From ‘Unbwogable’ (a Luo-English hybrid word meaning Unshakeable), the title of a rap song by Nairobi hip-hop duo Gidi Gidi Maji Maji. The song was adopted as the anthem of Mwai Kibaki whose National Rainbow Coalition party, then supported by Luo opposition leader Raila Odinga, triumphed in the December 2002 election, ending Daniel arap Moi’s oppressive presidency (See also Nyairo and Ogude 2005).

Bush – Refers to Bush, a 7-year boy I met during fieldwork in 2010. His parents were devoted followers of Pastor Awuor, a Luo prophet whose Ministry of Repentance and Holiness offers miracle cures for HIV. After their deaths Bush came to live with his grandmother in Akinda. She took him to the local HIV treatment centre, where he was initiated on anti-retroviral therapy and transformed from desperately sick and emaciated into a healthy, happy child. She nicknamed him ‘Bush’ after US President Bush, under whose presidency PEPFAR (The President’s Emergency Plan For AIDS Relief) was created and facilitated the provision of free HIV drugs in Luoland.

Dar mpaka Moro (Swahili) – A song by Tanzanian Bongo Flava artists TMK Wanaume (2008). The song tells the story of two male hustlers making a journey from Dar es salaam to Morogoro. Very popular in 2008 and later in clubs, public transport and radio in Western Kenya. One of the group, YP, died in 2014. His death was mourned as another East African life cut short.

Digital – See **Migration**

Hustle – Informal, adaptable, entrepreneurial activities, sometimes semi-legal. Could include buying and reselling at inflated prices, connecting people with service providers at a price. ‘Doctors they know how to treat people, lawyers know the law. We don’t have any skills - except we know how to hustle’ (Self-proclaimed hustler, field-diary quote).

Kazi va Vijana! Pesa Kwa Wzee? (Swahili) – Work for Youth! Money for Elders? A national government scheme, Kazi va Vijana, was launched in 2009 supported with funding from the World Bank. It was designed to build moral character and boost declining infrastructure through short-term intensive group work projects like road-building and litter picking, that would ultimately leave entrepreneurial youth with a small pot of honestly earned cash held in a bank account, that they could leverage to boost their own hustler activities. Quickly renamed as Kazi va Vijana! Pesa Kwa Wazee? (Work for Youth! money for elders?) the project rapidly collapsed in 2011 amid valid claims of corruption and the withdrawal of World Bank support.

Migration – The so-called ‘great migration’ from analogue to digital television, a national pun on Kenya’s most famous tourist attraction, the Great Wildebeest Migration across the river Mara, began in December 2009 when then-President Mwai Kibaki launched the digital signal. The initiative, branded as ‘Digital Kenya’, quickly became a powerful metaphor for visions of political, ideological and economic change. As well as a critique of such. The migration was regarded a flagship project of Vision 2030, Kenya’s national development plan. Current President Uhuru Kenyatta’s Jubilee party utilized it in their campaign slogans, dubbing themselves ‘digital boys’, versus the ‘analogue old boys vanguard’. ‘Analogue’ and ‘digital’ firmly found their place in sheng, a popular slang patois that constantly mixes and reinvents Kenya’s multiple languages. In rural Akinda people made subtle, layered jokes about being ‘JoDigital’ (Eng-Luo) or ‘digital people’. The terms, a little like the earlier ‘dot com’ become playful and imaginative linguistic short-cuts referring to perceived modern versus traditional ways of acting, thinking and being. But, reflecting the experience of the migration itself which was marred by corruption scandals and stand-offs between the government, and Chinese and local television companies, such terms were not considered either unambiguously good or bad. (See also Nyabola 2018)

Mikono juu (Swahili) – Throw your hands in the air. A joyful phrase often used in East Africa pop music, especially in the chorus. This phrase was used in conversation with a Kenyan from another part of Kenya to describe the irrepressible attitude of JoLuo: ‘Even when everything is going wrong and life is really hard, they still dance in the clubs like *Mikono juu!*’ (despairing tone. Field diary notes).

Mor Dhiang (Dholuo) – ‘Happiness of a cow’, a traditional delicacy. A kind of ghee made by leaving a gourd in place over a cow’s teat for some time. This treat is nostalgically remembered from childhood by some JoLuo of the generation described here who grew up in, or regularly visited, rural homes in childhood. It is associated with a rural way of life that is seen as being lost. It is also a reference to the earlier importance of cattle both as bride-wealth and a marker of riches and a good, healthy life.

M-Pesa – Mobile phone money platform launched in Kenya in 2007, which rapidly transformed the flows of money (See also Maurer 2015).

M-Pigs – Reference to greedy Kenyan MPs, after they voted to increase their salaries in 2013.

Ninja (sheng) – Street boy. Nimble, shadowy, quiet, surviving (barely). In Kisumu city, they can be found sleeping in the bus station ditches, sniffing glue, playing football. They do not

exist in rural Akina, where they are, instead, ‘orphans’ sleeping in the kitchens’ of their distant relatives or struggling with their older siblings in dilapidated homes.

Obama Wuod Alego (Dholuo) – Obama, Son of Alego (a place/clan). US President Obama was claimed in Luoland as ‘Our Son’. His grandmother’s village is close to Kisumu city. His first campaign in 2008 offered some measure of hope in the region after the 2007 Kenyan election was ‘stolen’ from Luo opposition leader Raila Odinga (See Madiaga et al. 2008).

Ocampo – A 2011 famine in Luoland was nicknamed Ocampo, after International Criminal Court prosecutor Luis Moreno Ocampo who summoned six prominent political figures to the Hague for their part in Kenya’s 2008 post-election violence, including current President Uhuru Kenyatta. The famine’s nickname referred to the financial drain these suspects’ attempts to evade prosecution were having on the country’s economy.

Okbichaloni (Dholuo) – Things aren’t what they seem to be. Know that for sure. Originally derived from a saying by supporters of Luo football team, Gor Mahia, about controversial football match results. Took hold in Luoland in 2013 in reference to political machinations around the aborted Orange Democratic Party nominations in the run up to the national elections. Now used more generally.

Otonglo (old or ‘deep’ Dholuo) – Money. ‘Otonglo Time’ is the title of a song by pioneering Luo rapper Poxi **Presha** who died of TB, an AIDS related opportunistic infection in 2005 at the age of 34. In 2013 a secondary school drama student had President Kenyatta and the nation in hysterics in a schools’ competition with his witty, charming narrative ‘Otonglo Time,’ (Money Time), which used the parts of the original song as a chorus. He told the story of a Luo boy who travelled from HIS village to Nairobi in search of big dreams, but instead found himself forced to return to village life after living in a slum, where he had to pay even to ‘make long calls, short calls and SMS (the notorious Kibera slum flying toilets). Aptly, the student proved to be a skilled digital hustler, ending his performance with ‘Mr President – tweet me, *yawa!*’ In fact, musician Jaguar offered to sponsor his remaining education and the President then awarded him a full scholarship to university. The next verse is a newspaper quote from the mother of a different school boy who also performed in a drama competition a year later in 2014 and to whom the President promised a family home as a prize. In 2019 the house was finally gifted but rejected by the mother as not being of fit enough quality for a presidential gift. This has resonance because homes and home-construction are important markers of identity and debate in Luoland. And, as I was writing this piece in 2019, Bush’s older brother, now a teacher, was complaining bitterly to me about the automatically deductions taken from his salary to finance the government’s affordable housing scheme; especially galling as he had constructed his own rural home, and rebuilt his mother’s before even joining college (see image).

Pressure/Presha – Song popular in Kenya by Tanzanian artist Hafsa ft Banana Zorro (2007). The music video featured scenes of stressful love and relationships. Pressure also refers to the emergence of a new colloquial medical condition in recent years known as ‘pressure’ and encompassing, variously, stress/high blood pressure/hypertension/diabetes and connected with stressful modern lifestyles.

Repent and prepare the way – A reference to the slogan of Pastor Awuor, a Luo prophet of the Ministry of Repentance and Holiness, who preaches miracles and prophesies. His rallies are attended by thousands and are preceded by devoted followers sweeping the streets to make them ready for his presence. His CV includes claims of an overseas PhD in bio-chemistry and he regularly announces miracle healing for HIV. Sweeping roads with green leaves is a form of celebration, which was also used in Kisumu City during Obama's victories.

Sweet Life – Sweet Life ('La vie est belle') is a song recorded by Congolese singer Fally Ipupa, from his third studio album, *Power 'Kosa Leka'* (2013). Congolese music is very popular in Kenya and this song was ubiquitous on public transport, nightclubs and the radio throughout 2013. *Mit* (Dholuo) meaning sweet, is also used to describe the pleasurable feeling of sex without a condom. The use of Sweet Life here is also a reference to concerns about the rapidly rising price of sugar and sugar stock-outs in both Akinda/Kisumu documented in my field-diaries in 2010/11. Tea without sugar was seen as marker of poverty, and a way of talking about inflation and economic crises.

Wanaigeukia (Swahili) – 'They turn against me'. From 'Kigeugeu' a 2011 song by Kenyan musician, Jaguar. *Kigeugeu*, derived from the Swahili verb *geuke* (to turn about) means a person or a character, usually one who is supposed to exemplify trust, responsibility and goodness like a church leader, government official, medical professional or friend, but who is inconsistent, every-changing and undependable. In the music video, Jaguar, an archetypal hustler, decked out in a uniform of jeans, t-shirt, white trainers and heavy bling – gold chains, bracelets and ear-rings - drives his BMW through the capital city's highways interspersed with scenes where people described as *kigeugeu* try to get between him and his attempts to, in his words 'hustle up and down to cross the border.' He sings about his frustration and where to find a role model in a world where doctors to put patients already dead on life support, babies are switched at birth by midwives, politicians make promises of development but deliver only increase in their own girth, pastors offer wise counsel then sleep with your wife, and even street beggars shake off their crippled demeanours after a day's work and walk home as businessmen. *Kigeugeu*, his song claims, is endemic; a feature of modern African life that the serious hustler has to grapple with. In 2017 Jaguar became an MP.

Wash-wash – Making counterfeit money

Winner's Chapel – Winner's Chapel is an evangelical organisation with branches worldwide. During my fieldwork a new huge church building was constructed opposite the then biggest mall in Kisumu City. This is also a reference to the popularity of the 'prosperity gospel' in Western Kenya, where church goers are entreated to donate cash and possessions in order to receive them back ten-fold. As well as a further pun on concerns about the rapidly growing popularity of online and mobile phone betting as way to trying to earn money in Kenya, especially among youth. The biblical verse quoted is from Luke 6, versus 38. Citadel in this context refers both to the enormity of the new church and Citadel, the transnational business organisation and leading investor in the world's financial markets.

References

- Aellah, G., 2020. "Understanding men, mood, and avoidable deaths from AIDS in Western Kenya." *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 1-16. doi: 10.1080/13691058.2019.1685131.
- Aellah, G., and Geissler, P.W., 2016. "Seeking Exposure: conversions of scientific knowledge in an African City." *Journal of Modern African Studies*. doi: 10.1017/S0022278X16000240.
- Aellah, G., and Okoth, A., 2019. "'Living Honourably and Independently'. Dreaming of a Good Village Life in an African Rural Health and Demographic Surveillance System Site." *Etnofoor*, 31(2), 103-20. doi: 10.2307/26856488.
- Aellah, G., Chantler, T., and Geissler, P.W., 2016. *Global Health Research in an Unequal World: Ethics Case Studies from Africa*. Oxford: CABI.
- Archambault, J.S., 2013. "Cruising through Uncertainty: Cell Phones and the Politics of Display and Disguise in Inhambane, Mozambique", *American Ethnologist*, 40(1), 88-101. doi: 10.1111/amet.12007.
- Cooper, E., and Pratten, D., 2015. *Ethnographies of Uncertainty in Africa*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Di Nunzio, M., 2012. "'We Are Good at Surviving': Street Hustling in Addis Ababa's Inner City", *Urban Forum*, 23(4), 433-47. doi: 10.1007/s12132-012-9156-y.
- Jones, G., and Omondi, J., 2013. "#KenyaDecides2013 – Part 3 – Aborted primaries muddy the local elections in rural Kenya". In *Africa at LSE*. <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/74816/>.
- Madiega, P., Chantler, T., Jones, G., and Prince, R., 2008. "'Our Son Obama': The US Presidential Election in Western Kenya", *Anthropology Today*, 24(6), 4-7. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8322.2008.00625.x.
- Mains, D., 2013. *Hope Is Cut: Youth, Unemployment, and the Future in Urban Ethiopia*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Maurer, B., 2015. *How Would You Like to Pay?: How Technology Is Changing the Future of Money*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Njogu, K., and Maupeu, H., 2007. *Songs and Politics in Eastern Africa*. Nairobi: Mkuki na Nyota Publishers.
- Nyabola, N., 2018. *Digital Democracy, Analogue Politics: How the Internet Era is Transforming Kenya*. London: Zed Books.
- Nyairo, J., and Ogude, J., 2005. "Popular Music, Popular Politics: Unbwogable and the Idioms of Freedom in Kenyan Popular Music", *African Affairs*, 104(415), 225-49. doi: 10.1093/afrad/adi012.

Ochieng, J.J., 2016. "A Linguistic Analysis of the Metaphorical Euphemisms Used in Dholuo HIV/AIDS Discourse", University of Nairobi, MA Thesis.

Prince, R.J., 2006. "Popular Music and Luo Youth in Western Kenya: Ambiguities of Modernity, Morality and Gender Relations in the Era of AIDS", in C. Christiansen, M. Utas, and H.E. Vigh (eds.), *Navigating Youth, Generating Adulthood Social Becoming in an African Context*. Upsalla: Nordiska Afrikainstitute. 117-52.

Prince, R.J., 2013. "Precarious Projects: Conversions of (Biomedical) Knowledge in an East African City", *Medical Anthropology*, 33(1), 68-83. doi: 10.1080/01459740.2013.833918.

Acknowledgments

Research was made possible through a PhD scholarship through the Leverhulme Trust under a Research Leadership Award, [PW Geissler F/02 116D], a small grant from the British Institute of East Africa [Aellah], and the Wellcome Trust [PW Geissler GR 077430].

Grateful thanks to my institutional collaborators at NCRO/CHA, the research staff, research participants, and others who gave up their time to talk to me, as well as my PhD supervisors. Special acknowledgements also due to Phil, Molly O Lucy, Rosemary, and Ken.

And an extra verse for the Star-kuzz:

But hey yo!

Donge ok bi chaloni

Sama wandiko PHD papers to waoroni

Ok bi chaloni.